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AUTHOR Fidler, Paul P.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

During orientation in the summer of 1971, a questionnaire designed to determine the political attitudes of students was administered to the incoming freshmen at the University of South Carolina (USC). In this report this data is compared to national data from 325 other institutions and data obtained from incoming freshmen during 1969, 1970, and 1971. An examination of the data indicates the following trends: (1) USC freshmen are less likely to express a left and are more likely to express a middle-of-the-road political preference than their national counterparts. (2) 1971 entering freshmen at USC are considerably more apt to express a left than a right political preference. (3) In-state freshmen were more likely to express a left and less likely to express a right preference than were out-of-state freshmen at USC. (4) The overall increase in left political preference expressed by USC entering freshmen does not appear to be related to sex or state residency. A more pervasive societal trend is suspected that should be closely watched for its impact on campus life. (HS)

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Division of Student Affairs

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Subject: Current Political Preferences of Entering Freshmen at the University of South Carolina, 1969 - 1971

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Principal Researchers: Dr. Paul P. Fidler
Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs

Ms. Jan Jordan
Graduate Assistant for Resident Education

Ms. Nena Frost
1971 Masters Graduate in Student Personnel

RESEARCH NOTE

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Nature and Scope of the Study

During orientation in the summer of 1971, a questionnaire prepared by the American Council of Education was administered to the incoming freshmen at the University of South Carolina and 325 other institutions of higher education (64 two-year colleges, 230 four-year colleges, and 32 universities). The resulting summary data on entering freshmen included information on the entering freshmen at the University of South Carolina and weighted normative data on questionnaire results from the 32 participating universities. Similar data were also available for the entering freshmen classes of 1969 and 1970.

The following is part of a series of reports drawn from analyses of these data. This report focuses on the item in the questionnaire in which the student was asked to indicate "current political preference." The report examines the political preferences of U. S. C. freshmen in 1971 and compares them to the national university norms for that year. An analysis of replies on the basis of sex and state residency is presented for 1969, 1970, and 1971.

The report concludes with a summary of observed trends over the three year period.

Table 1 - Comparison of Current Political Preference of USC 1971 Entering Freshmen with National Norms for Entering Freshmen.[1]

Current Political Preference	1971 USC Percentages	1971 National Percentages
Left	38.8	44.1
Middle of Road	45.5	41.9
Right	15.5	14.1

1. USC entering freshmen were less "left" and slightly more middle of the road in their political preference than their national counterparts. The differences between USC results and national norms has decreased during the past several years. In 1969, USC entering freshmen showed much greater percentage differences with the national norms in each category.

2. The percentage of USC entering freshmen expressing a "right" preference is about the same as the national norms.

3. USC entering freshmen are more than twice as likely to express a left preference than a right preference.

[1]Due to a slight alteration in the responses to this item on the 1969, 1970, and 1971 versions of the ACE questionnaire, data in all tables of this report were converted to "left," "middle-of-the-road," and "right" to facilitate comparison.

Actual and converted responses were:

1969 Responses	1970 Responses	1971 Responses	Converted Responses
Left	Far Left	Far Left	LEFT
Liberal	Liberal	Liberal	
Middle-of-Road	Middle-of-Road	Middle-of-Road	MIDDLE-OF-ROAD
Moderately Conservative	Conservative	Conservative	RIGHT
Strongly Conservative	Right	Far Right	

Table 2 - Comparison of Current Political Preference of USC Entering Freshmen in 1969, 1970, and 1971

	1969 USC Percentages (n=2674)	1970 USC Percentages (n=2561)	1971 USC Percentages (n=2260)
LEFT	26.1	32.3	38.8
MIDDLE OF ROAD	46.9	48.1	45.5
RIGHT	27.0	19.4	15.5

1. The table reveals that an increasingly larger percentage of USC entering freshmen selected a left political preference over a right political preference.
2. Approximately half of the USC entering freshmen selected a middle-of-the road preference in all three years.
3. In comparison with 1969 responses, data for USC entering freshmen for 1971 indicated an increase of about 12% in the choice of a left preference; this was offset by a decrease of about 12% in the choice of a right preference.

Table 3 - Comparison of Current Political Preference of USC Entering Freshmen in 1969, 1970, and 1971 by Sex

	1969 USC Male n=1421	1969 USC Female n=939	1970 USC Male n=1449	1970 USC Female n=1112	1971 USC Male n=1267	1971 USC Female n=1011
LEFT	26.9	24.9	34.0	30.0	40.7	36.4
MIDDLE-OF-ROAD	45.3	49.2	46.0	50.8	42.3	49.5
RIGHT	27.8	26.0	19.7	19.0	16.7	13.9

1. There appeared to be no important differences between USC males and females in their current political preference during 1969, 1970, or 1971.

2. Males and females increased in their choice of a left preference for 1970 and 1971; this was offset by a decrease in the choice of a right preference.

3. In all three, males seemed slightly more inclined to express a left or right political preference than females.

4. Females seemed slightly more inclined to express a middle-of-road preference than males. This finding was true in 1969, 1970, and 1971.

5. Whereas in 1969 the left and right preferences of both males and females differed by only about 1%, in 1971 the difference had risen to about 24% for males and about 23% for females.

Table 4 - Comparison of Current Political Preference of USC Entering Freshmen in 1969, 1970, and 1971 by State Residency

	1969 In-State n=1690	1969 Out-State n=670	1970 In-State n=1893	1970 Out-State n=668	1971 In-State n=1819	1971 Out-State n=441
LEFT	24.1	31.2	30.8	36.9	39.3	37.2
MIDDLE-OF-ROAD	47.5	45.2	49.1	45.4	45.5	45.8
RIGHT	28.5	23.4	20.1	17.7	15.2	17.0

1. Out-of-state freshmen were more inclined to express a left political preference than were in-state freshmen. A reverse took place in 1971, however, as in-state freshmen surpassed out-of-state freshmen for the first time in recent years.

2. In-state freshmen were slightly more inclined to express a right or middle-of-road political preference than were out-of-state freshmen in 1969 and 1970. Out-of-state freshmen were more inclined to express a right political preference in 1971.

3. Over the three year period, the percentage of in-state freshmen expressing a left preference increased about 15 percent compared to a 6 percent increase by out-of-state freshmen. During the same period, the percentage of in-state students expressing a right preference decreased about 13 percent whereas the corresponding decrease for out-of-state students was only about 6 percent.

SUMMARY: Upon examining the data the following trends were noted:

1. USC freshmen students are less likely to express a left political preference and are more likely to express a middle-of-road political preference than their national counterparts. The extent of difference has diminished however over the three-year period.
2. 1971 entering freshmen at USC are considerably more apt to express a left political preference than a right political preference. This represents a substantial shift in the class' political profile in two years time.
3. The widely-held view that entering freshmen from South Carolina are more conservative than are those freshmen from out-of-state was dispelled in 1971. For the first time in recent years, in-state freshmen were more likely to express a left preference and less likely to express a right preference than were out-of-state freshmen.
4. The overall increase in left political preference expressed by USC entering freshmen does not appear to be related to sex or state residency. A more pervasive societal trend is suspected which should be closely watched for its impact on campus life.